

An old man remembers: Evander's farewell to Pallas in the *Aeneid*

J.E.M. Geach

When Aeneas bids farewell to his son Ascanius in book 12 of the *Aeneid*, Virgil calls upon the rich history of goodbyes addressed by fathers to sons in classical literature. The earliest example comes in book 6 of the *Iliad*, the famous scene where the baby Astyanax is terrified by the nodding plume on his father's helmet. The same motif is evoked by Sophocles in the *Ajax*, where Ajax, whom the audience know to be on the verge of suicide, takes up his son and urges him to be more fortunate than your father, but in other things the same. Both these scenes, full of tenderness and affection, are alluded to by Virgil. The famous words of Ajax are recalled book 12 of the *Aeneid*, in Aeneas' parting words to his son Ascanius: 'learn courage and hard labour from me, good fortune from others'. And indeed the same scene also has echoes of the scene between Hector (Aeneas' brother, and Ascanius' uncle), Andromache and Astyanax in the *Iliad*. But as ever, it is the differences that count for most; and it seems that Virgil exploits these differences to discredit Aeneas by comparison with his literary predecessors. Whereas Hector had prayed that his son might be acclaimed as greater than himself, Aeneas directs his son to be sure to remember that his father was Aeneas, and his uncle Hector – Aeneas seems to want to keep Ascanius in his place (though in fact Ascanius is substantially older than Astyanax). Most significantly, the tenderness of Hector, who set his helmet on the ground to avoid frightening his son, is lacking in Aeneas, who bids farewell through his visor. This farewell reveals a great deal to us about the less pleasant side of Aeneas.

An old man inside a young man

There is another intergenerational farewell in the *Aeneid*: the parting of Evander and Pallas in book 8, filled with the same dim foreboding that conventionally characterizes this kind of scene. But it differs importantly from the model we have seen so far. In this farewell, it is not the hero going into the battle is not the older man, but the younger. The reader is immediately confronted with a new twist on an old theme. This twisting of themes is seen throughout the farewell speech of Evander. Whether Pallas is the grandson or son of Evander is unclear; it is, however, clear that the scene alludes to Telemachus' arrival at the palace of Nestor in search of news of his father in the *Odyssey*. Both episodes share the theme of the arrival of strangers amid a festival. This recollection is underlined by Pallas' question to Aeneas: Do you come in war or in peace? This alludes to the question put by Nestor to Telemachus when he arrives in Pylos: 'Are you pirates?'

Manners are not as polished in Virgil's Pallanteum as in Homer's Pylos: Nestor has the good grace to postpone his question until after Telemachus has shared in the prayers and the feasting. Nevertheless, this reminder of the heroic world is evidently deliberate: the exchanges of stories between Aeneas and Evander (in particular Aeneas' claim of kinship through Atlas, and Evander's recollection of Anchises' state visit escort-

ing Hesione and the guest gift given to him by Anchises) clearly signal that we are in a heroic setting with a Homeric atmosphere. Placing us in the Homeric world prepares us for one aspect in particular of the farewell between Evander and Pallas. As the older man begins his farewell, he says 'I wish that Jupiter would bring back the years past, and restore me to my former state.' This opening evokes Nestor's endless boasting of his experience in the days before Troy, when he was invited to fight in company with such as Peirithoos and Druas in front of Phersis. Evander's statesmanlike summary of the military and political position of the Etrurians has shown us that he is full of experience and good advice. Again like Nestor, he presents himself as old, and apt to be sidetracked into a story, which once he has begun, he is not able to stop: for the next seven lines interrupt his conditional clause, as he tells - as so often before - the story of his defeat of Erulus.

Coming out of the story, Evander resumes his farewell, emphasising his hopes for Pallas' safe return and his willingness to endure anything for Pallas' safe return. The high emotion of the rest of the speech, in which Evander cannot bear to express the idea of Pallas' death - if, Fortune, you threaten some unspeakable disaster is very oblique - indicates that the story of his past exploits that has fallen so readily from Evander's lips has not only likened him to the literary precedent of Nestor, but has also given him relief from his overwhelming emotion. Saying goodbye to Pallas is so intolerable that he would very much rather lapse into the familiar story than continue his farewell. That the impact of the farewell is overwhelming is clearly indicated by Virgil: at the end of the speech, Evander collapses in a dead faint, and has to be carried back into the house by his slaves.

By combining various elements and allusions, Virgil has created a scene of extreme emotion: Evander's lapse into a familiar story both indicates that he is old and that he is pushing away the moment of farewell with all his might; the story is a retreat from the strength of his emotions. Aeneas, we know, will triumph and enjoy three years of peace; this farewell on the other hand, despite the role reversal between father and son, recalls the final farewells of Hector and Ajax, and intimates to us that Pallas is doomed.